



State of California

LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION

March 9, 2005

The Honorable Sheila Kuehl
Member, California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 5108
Sacramento, CA 95814

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Senator

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Joseph Rodota

James P. Mayer
Executive Director

RE: SUPPORT FOR SENATE BILL 366

Dear Senator Kuehl:

The Little Hoover Commission supports SB 366, the measure you have authored relating to female offenders. In its December 2004 report, *Breaking the Barriers for Women on Parole*, the Commission affirmed that female offenders differ from male offenders in their personal histories and pathways to crime. These differences have important implications for policies and programs in institutions and for community corrections.

For example, female offenders are far less likely to be convicted of violent offenses than males or to be considered a danger to their community. The majority of female offenders also are victims. Nationally, 57 percent of female offenders have been physically or sexually abused before going to prison, compared to 16 percent of male offenders. Female offenders are far more likely to be single parents. Nationally, of those offenders living with their children prior to arrest, 46 percent of female offenders were living in a single-parent household, compared to 15 percent of male offenders.

Furthermore, the majority of female offenders are incarcerated in large, remote prisons that undermine the chances that they will become self-sufficient and law-abiding when released. Research suggests that search and supervision practices within prisons often re-traumatize women with histories of sexual and physical abuse, but the Department of Corrections has not addressed these issues.

The Commission concluded the State needs to embrace the knowledge regarding the characteristics and needs of female offenders and enact reforms to improve outcomes for them, their children and their communities. It recommended the Department of Corrections develop a strategic plan for female offenders and include input and ownership of staff and management; statements of values, mission, goals and objectives. It added that the plan include an implementation scheme that delineates activities, budgets, timelines and those responsible for the outcomes.

Because SB 366 addresses the Commission's findings and recommendations relating to the unique gender-based issues that exist for female offenders, the Commission is taking an active support on the measure. As the bill moves through the committee process, I will be writing letters on behalf of the Commission to legislators urging aye votes. If you feel my presence and testimony at a hearing would be helpful, please let me know, and I will make every attempt to be available.

Sincerely,

James P. Mayer
Executive Director

c: Commissioner